

The Confessor's Tongue for May 29, A. D. 2016

5th Sunday of Pascha; Samaritan Woman; Virgin Martyr Theodosia

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

Worship in Spirit and in Truth

Blessed Theophylact

Here is an example of patristic exegesis (interpretation) of a significant biblical text. Guided by the Spirit, multiple levels of meaning are found. The author, Theophylact, lived in Bulgaria about 1100, wrote commentaries on the Gospels, drawing on the work of those who had gone before him, especially that of the great St. John Chrysostom. Here is commentary on part of today's Gospel reading, with three different but complimentary interpretations.

The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.
John 4:23-24

"We Jews have a form of worship superior to yours; nevertheless, the worship of the Jews will also come to an end. Not only will the places of worship change, but the manner of worship as well. This change is at the very door, and *now is*; the statutes taught by the prophets will not last much longer."

By *true worshippers*, the Lord means those who love according to His law, who neither confine God to one place, as do the Samaritans, nor serve Him with a material worship, as do the Jews, but who worship Him *in spirit and in truth*, that is, with their soul and the purity of mind. Because God is *spirit*, which means He is bodiless. He must be worshipped in an incorporeal manner appropriate to the soul, which is both spiritual and bodiless. The Lord knew that many heretics would soon appear, seeming to worship Him incorporeally, but not holding to the Orthodox doctrine regarding His person. With this in mind the Lord adds the words *and in truth*. For one must do both: worship God noetically, and hold to true doctrine regarding the nature of His being.

By a different interpretation, some say that *spirit and truth* refer to the two aspects of our Christian philosophy: active virtue [*praxis*] ad divine vision [*theoria*]. *In spirit* means "by activity". The Apostle Paul writes, *As many as are led by the Spirit of God . . . mortify the deeds [tas praxeis] of the body* [Rom. 8:13-14]. And again, *The desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh* {Gal. 5:17}. Therefore, to worship the Father in spirit implies the active practice of the virtues [to subdue the flesh]. To worship Him *in truth* implies contemplation of the divine. This is what Paul means when he writes, *Therefore let us keep the feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* [I Cor. 5:8]. *Sincerity* refers to purity of life, which is active virtue; *truth* refers to divine vision [*theretike*], which is, contemplation of the true dogma of the divine Word.

By yet a third interpretation, *spirit and truth* may also be understood as follows. On the one hand, the

Samaritans viewed God as a divinity limited to a particular location, and believe He must be worshipped only "in this place." On the other, all the religious observances of the Jews consisted in types of figures of things to come. Thus the words *in spirit* are addressed to the Samaritans: "You Samaritans offer to God a kind of worship that limits Him to one location. True worshippers will not be limited by locality; they will worship *in spirit*, which means, with mind and soul. Neither will they worship by means of types and figures, as do the Jews. Instead, they will worship *in truth*, in full reality, when the Jewish customs and observances have come to an end." Since the Judaic law, understood according to the letter, was a type and shadow, perhaps the words *in spirit* are contradistinctive to the letter of the law. (For the law of the letter no longer prevails among us, but in its place, the law of the spirit, *for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life* [2 Cor. 3:6].) And the words *in truth* are contradistinctive to the types and foreshadowings. Therefore the Lord proclaims that *the hour cometh, and indeed now is*. He is referring to the time of His advent in the flesh, when true worshippers will not worship in one place only, like the Samaritans, but in every place will offer immaterial worship according to the Spirit. Paul expresses the same thought when he writes, *God is my witness, Whom I worship with my spirit* [Rom 1:9]. Nor will true worshippers offer service to God that is a type and shadow of things to come, as did the Jews. Instead, they will offer true worship, containing nothing obscure. Such are the worshippers whom God seeks: spiritual, because He is spirit, and true, because He is truth.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep my commandments." John 14:15

A Christian is one who confesses his faith in the God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and who loves that God. But how can man know that he, in fact, loves God, whom he has not seen?

For those who conceive of love as an emotion of warm, favorable disposition to another, love for God is either something you have or do not have. Those who do not feel the emotion may feel bad that they do not feel love for God and may try to manufacture the feeling. This is one reason why much contemporary Christian music outside the Orthodox Church is characterized by a saccharine emotionalism calculated to stir up the desired emotions in the listener.

But Christ Himself tells us what love for God is and how we can know that we love Him; "If ye love Me, keep my commandments." Here is an objective standard to discern love for God. He who loves God demonstrates it by submitting himself to Christ in keeping Christ's commandments. Whether one feels

loving toward God or not is irrelevant here: one's love is manifested in one's obedience to the Master. Lack of obedience reveals that love is absent, regardless of how warm and loving one may feel. God Himself cries out against feeling without action when he says, This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). And again, "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Ezekiel 33:31-32).

The connection between love for God and the keeping of His commandments is not new with Christ but is clearly to be seen in the Old Covenant with Israel. In the second commandment from Sinai (graven images), God concludes by speaking of Himself as One who shows "mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:6). Very often in the Hebrew Scriptures, an idea is put forward in the first half of a sentence and elaborated upon in the second. Thus those who love God are the same ones who keep His commandments. This appears again in Deuteronomy (11:1): "Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, always." A man loves God by keeping His charge, statutes, judgments, and commandments; conversely, to do these things is to love God. This juxtaposition of loving God and keeping His commandments, variously expressed occurs at least five more times in Deuteronomy.

Beyond the Torah, Joshua reminds the people of this duty at the end of his life after they have taken possession of the Promised Land: "But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Joshua 22:5). Daniel uses it in his prayer of intercession for the Hebrews in captivity at the conclusion of the seventy years, "O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments..." as does Nehemiah in his prayer to God for the Jews who had returned from exile but had not yet rebuilt Jerusalem's walls: "O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments."

Christ, then, in linking love for God with keeping the commandments expresses an old theme but in a new way, as He speaks of keeping the commandments He Himself gives to His disciples as the basis for loving Him and abiding in His love.

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Value of the Jesus Prayer

The prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner", consists of two basic points: the dogmatic one—acknowledgement of the Divinity of Christ—and the suppliant one—supplication for our salvation. That is, the confession of faith in Christ is connected with the confession of our inability to be saved of our own accord. This says everything, and the whole struggle of the Christian is based on these two points: faith in Christ and awareness of our sinfulness. The "Jesus Prayer", therefore, expresses all the effort of the faithful in a few words and summarizes all the dogmatic teaching of our Orthodox Church.

We acquire this double knowledge through the Jesus Prayer. St. Maximus points out that the passion of pride consists of *two ignorances*: the ignorance of the Divine power and the ignorance of human weakness. And this double ignorance creates a "confused mind". Proud, therefore, is the man of ignorance, whereas, on the contrary, humble is the man of *double knowledge*. The latter knows his own weakness and the power of Christ. So, we acknowledge and confess the power of Christ (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God) as well as our own weakness (have mercy on me the sinner) through the Jesus Prayer. We acquire in this way the blessed state of humility. Where there is humility, there also is the grace of Christ, and this grace is the Kingdom of Heaven. Can you see, then, the worth of the Jesus Prayer? Can you see that we can obtain the Kingdom of God by its power?

From the Diary of a Russian Priest

If we are not allowed to judge, how can we help our erring brother? By turning our attention to the beam in our own eye; only then, after we have struggled to remove it, shall we understand how deep-seated are the causes of sin, how hard it is to fight against it, what are the means whereby it can be cured, how great are the pity and compassion that the sinner deserves; and these feelings of ours, and our experience of the struggle with sin, will help us to remove the mote from our brother's eye—through compassion, example, love. Judgment will disappear of itself.

'The desert lulls the passions to sleep', but man is still required to uproot them (St. Isaac the Syrian). This is the advantage of living in the world: through our meetings and conflicts with people and circumstances, such a life reveals our passions and sinful inclinations to us.

Read continually such words as feed your soul, and direct you to the one true goal in life. Here, a certain asceticism, self-limitation, self-coercion, are necessary. *Every Christian is an ascetic*. Keep this in mind. Human nature is so distorted that you will have to exercise a ruthless pressure upon it if you want to straighten it out according to the Gospel measures, and you will have to do this straightening out every day, every hour, May God help you in this task!

Upcoming Events 2015-16

30 May Memorial Day Picnic
9 June Holy Ascension
11 June, Saturday, Installation of Bishop Alexander,
St. Seraphim's, Dallasxo
30-31 July, 15-Year Anniversary with Bishop
Alexander

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!